

Mullica Watershed Planning Project Public Meeting
October 30, 2001, 6:00 - 8:00 pm
South County Regional Library, Atco, NJ
Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Annette Barbaccia (Executive Director, NJ Pinelands Commission) welcomed the group and thanked everyone for participating in the Mullica watershed management planning process. John Stokes (Assistant Director, NJ Pinelands Commission) gave a brief review of the watershed project. He noted that the Pinelands Commission is the lead agency for the Mullica Watershed (a.k.a. Watershed Management Area 14) Planning Project under contract with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and is responsible for organizing the effort and facilitating the involvement of all stakeholders in the watershed. He also noted that this is an ongoing process and that the project Steering Committee is meant to represent the broadest possible range of watershed interests. He then described the goals for tonight's meeting:

1. Discuss ongoing project activities (including development of a project Vision Statement) and get public input
2. Discuss plan for initial Technical Focus Groups (TFGs), and ask for suggestions for groups and individuals who might be appropriate to serve on them
3. Provide examples of and obtain ideas for "Action Now" projects

Action Item: Vision Statement

Chris Krupka (Watershed Coordinator, NJ Pinelands Commission) gave an overview of the vision statement development process, describing it as a concise statement of the group's common vision for the watershed that is required under the NJDEP contract. She noted that it is an opportunity to think about the ways we value this watershed and a guide for our other activities throughout the watershed planning process. She then outlined the background materials used by Pinelands Commission staff and the Steering Committee to develop the draft vision statement:

1. Public input from the April 4 kickoff meeting (participants listed a variety of watershed issues, most falling into four broad categories: water quality, public outreach/education/input, biological & habitat preservation and managing development/growth/land use);
2. Underlying planning concepts and regulatory framework already existing in the Mullica watershed (including the proposed NJDEP draft watershed management rules, the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, the Pinelands Protection Act, the NJ State Plan and the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act rules);
3. Vision statements developed by other watershed groups.

Chris then asked the group to review the draft vision statement, noting that in their discussion, the Steering Committee had tried to incorporate the unique characteristics of the Mullica watershed, the goals of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan and the broad range

of interests in the watershed. She then asked the group to answer the following questions:

- Is there anything missing from the draft vision statement?
- Should anything in the draft vision statement be changed?

Comments on the draft vision statement were as follows:

- How does this vision statement fit in with the regulatory process in terms of water quality/cleanup? Is it regulatory, voluntary, or both? Will the watershed management plan have any legal status? [Steve Jacobus (NJDEP-Division of Watershed Management) responded that the watershed management plan that will eventually be created by the group is meant to be a set of recommendations—developed cooperatively by the public and the NJDEP—that will ultimately be adopted by NJDEP. It will serve as regulatory guidance that may inform future policy decisions; Steve described it as a “living document” that will evolve over time and noted that “the key is local buy-in” of the recommendations made in the management plan.]
- There seems to be a conflict between the phrases “landscape that will remain largely pristine” and “appropriate and sustainable development.” How can both exist at the same time? These phrases should be clarified, perhaps by defining the term “largely pristine.” [Chris Krupka noted that in the Steering Committee discussion there was a recognition that the watershed contains a mix of diverse uses (e.g., public protected lands, commercial and residential development, agriculture, recreation, etc.), and she believed that the use of these phrases was an attempt to capture that recognition.]
- The key to the watershed management process is education, especially in the schools.
- There should also be a plan to identify the locations of pollution sources.

Action Item: Initial Technical Focus Groups (TFGs)

Rich Federman (Resource Planner, NJ Pinelands Commission) gave a brief overview of the initial Technical Focus Group (TFG) strategy, noting that the Steering Committee had proposed forming five groups: Habitat Preservation/Biodiversity, Sustainable Development, Recreation, Septic and Community Wastewater Systems and Agriculture. Each TFG would be responsible for considering relevant questions, examining the available data and identifying data gaps, and ultimately proposing a set of recommendations for the watershed management plan to the Steering Committee. The TFGs would be made up of technical experts in each topic area.

He also noted that a proposal would be made to the Steering Committee to form an additional Science and Technical Support Group. This group would help to establish a framework for considering watershed issues at a macro level as well as on a site-specific basis. They would also provide support and input to all the TFGs regarding overall water quality and supply issues. Rich then asked the group for input on the following questions:

- What questions/issues should each TFG address?
- What categories of experts are appropriate for each TFG?
- Do you have recommendations for experts to serve on each TFG?

He also provided the group with forms on which participants could write their own recommendations and comments and send them directly to the Watershed Coordinator. He

asked that this be done by the end of November so that they could be considered at the Dec. Steering Committee meeting. Comments on the Technical Focus Groups were as follows:

Habitat Preservation/Biodiversity

- Mention both flora and fauna (plants and animals) specifically.
- There is a need for long-term monitoring of all issues in the watershed.

Sustainable Development

- The list of groups that would be potential members of the focus group is not diverse enough. There need to be “watchdog” organizations involved in each focus group.

Recreation

- Add schools to the list of potential member groups.

Septic/ Community Wastewater Systems

No comments.

Agriculture

No comments.

Action Item: Action Now Projects

Larry Liggett (Planning Manager, NJ Pinelands Commission) described Action Now projects as short-term projects to improve water quality in the Mullica watershed. He then provided examples of potential Action Now projects in 10 broad categories (Implementation of Best Management Practices, Wetlands Buffer Enhancement, Education, Land Acquisition/ Permanent Protection, Streambank Stabilization/Restoration, Stream cleanups, Point Source Cleanup, Nonpoint Source Cleanup, Sustainable Development and Recreation) and asked the group for additional suggestions. Ideas for Action Now projects were as follows:

- In New Gretna, a 1930s public works project stormwater runoff system is directly discharging into the Bass River, impacting both shellfish and fin fish. It should be cleaned up and retrofitted.
- Introduce a K-12 watershed curriculum for area schools, including both a core curriculum and interdisciplinary lessons. [Steve Jacobus (NJDEP) noted that Ocean County has a successful program and that DEP and the AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassadors Program can provide additional educational resources.]
- The impacts of powerboat usage on the Mullica should be examined and education on environmentally responsible boating should be provided for boat users.
- In Egg Harbor City, there are several areas of Landing Creek which are experiencing water quality impacts. We should work with the township engineers on projects to address these water quality issues.
- Certain “highly sensitive” parts of the Mullica River should be restricted from recreational use. Physical barriers, signage and educational materials could be used to alert people to these areas.
- In the Bay area, there are problems with rotting bulkheads and lagoons that have not

been maintained.

- Along the Wading River, auto recycling yards are a potential source of polluted runoff and other water quality impacts. There may be ways to clean up these sites or to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce these impacts.
- A direct mailing to all watershed residents should be done to increase attendance at public meetings.

Next Steps

Pinelands Commission staff thanked everyone for their participation and noted that the input received at this meeting would be conveyed to the Steering Committee at their next meeting in December. The meeting summary and announcements about upcoming meetings will be posted on the project website and all questions and/or additional comments can be addressed to Chris Krupka, Watershed Coordinator.

The meeting ended at 8:00 pm and participants were invited to view exhibits from a variety of organizations located within the watershed: the Mullica Watershed Forum, the NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance and the US Environmental Protection Agency - Region II.

Please address all questions and comments to:
Christine Krupka, Watershed Coordinator
NJ Pinelands Commission
P.O. Box 7, New Lisbon, NJ 08064
Phone: 609-894-7300
Email: mullica@njpines.state.nj.us
Website: www.state.nj.us/pinelands/mullica